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Congress of the United States

October 19, 2012

Committee on Natural Resources
Ranking Member, Energy and
Minerals Subcommittee

Committee on Education and
the Workforce

Founder and Co-Chair,
Research & Development Caucus

The Honorable James R. Clapper, Jr.
Director of National Intelligence
Office of the Director of National Intelligence
Washington, DC 20511

Dear Director Clapper,

As you are aware, in July 2012 the McClatchy News Service ran a series of articles on alleged abuses of the polygraph process by the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO). In the articles, NRO officials are accused of "establishing a system that tracks the number of personal confessions, which then are used in polygraphers' annual performance reviews; summoning employees and job applicants for multiple polygraph tests to ask about a wide array of personal behavior; and altering results of the tests in what some polygraphers say is an effort to justify more probing of employees' and applicants' private lives."

I was appalled to read that in one case, a woman underwent multiple polygraphs until she disclosed details about how she had been sexually molested by a male relative. The accounts of the alleged treatment of federal employees and contractors and such voyeuristic interrogation bring to mind tactics employed by our former Soviet enemies on their own populations. These techniques, if there is any truth to the accounts, are outrageous, inappropriate, and have zero counterintelligence value. No doubt, reports of such tactics will make it harder for NRO to attract the talent it needs to perform its mission. I ask that you put an immediate end to any such practices at NRO and anywhere else in the Intelligence Community where such tactics have been employed.

It has been a decade since the National Academies review of polygraph use found that "Almost a century of research in scientific psychology and physiology provides little basis for the expectation that a polygraph test could have extremely high accuracy. The physiological responses measured by the polygraph are not uniquely related to deception." One need only recall the known cases of Americans continuing to spy for others despite regular polygraph testing to understand how flawed the technique is. Our efforts to uncover espionage in the Intelligence Community should be based on technologies and techniques that have a sound scientific and legal basis. I ask for a briefing from you on the research and development efforts underway in the IC to move us beyond the use of such an unreliable instrument as the polygraph.

Should you have any questions about this request, please contact Patrick Eddington on my staff at 202-225-5801 or via email at Patrick.Eddington@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

RUSH HOLT
Member of Congress